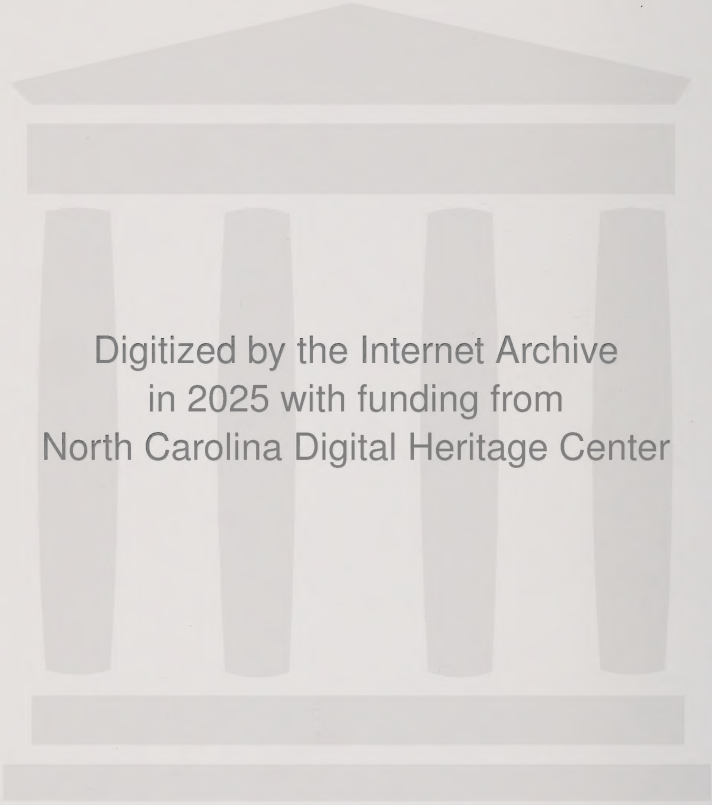
THE RHAPSODIST

Literature and Arts Journal

2012

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College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The Rhapsodist

Spring 2012

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College
Asheville, NC

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Editor's Note:

"When indifferent, the eye takes stills; when interested, movies" (Malcolm de Chazal qtd. in Auden).

Dear Reader,

With great joy we share this inaugural issue of The Rhapsodist, which marks the revival of a venue for literary and fine arts publication here at A-B Tech. The journal you hold in your hands is unique, containing the creative work of students, faculty, and staff—writers both seasoned and green. The Rhapsodist editors believe this blend perfectly represents our college's atmosphere: an inspirational and welcoming learning environment for everyone.

Taste of the following literature and art; chew and then digest. What you take in is the labor of your colleagues and classmates. The texts and images that follow are the poetic "movies" coaxed from the mundane. We hope, like us, you too will revel in the abundant creative energy this work displays.

Thanks for your support!

Auden, W.H. *A Certain World: A Commonplace Book.* New York: The Viking Press, 1970. 166. Print.

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rhapsodist, n.

Pronunciation: Brit. /'rapsədəst/ , U.S. /'ræpsədəst/
Etymology: < rhapsody n. + -ist suffix. Compare French rhapsodiste ...

1. A collector of miscellaneous literary pieces. Now hist. and rare.

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"rhapsodist." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 3rd ed. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, 2011.Web. 8 March 2012.

Extra 4 by halima flynt

Prelude, Dawn, Sunrise
by taylor walker mitchell

The dew turns to frost
on the window screen
in the early morning chill
darkened light ripples through
lattice and crystal
the air sings
(clear)
in quiet voices
and her breath
her breath
is heavy--
of stillness and peace

Cheek nestled, nose scrunched and warm,
to the kiss between his shoulders,
her breath on his back
the strongest wave.

Face to face,
Respiration bridges the narrow span,
teasing full-faced flutters,
each pulse expanding ear-to-ear

Sestina
by tamsen turner todisco

inhale. waiting, drinking. he's coming over.
brushing teeth, wash hands orange from cheetos
take a shower. its dirty two male roommates and the plastic
is covered in scum. pull on underpants, bra frothy
with lace, wonder if discomfort is worth it, change shirt
four times, discarded three hit floor.

exhale. stare at his head as it watches the tv. the floor
could drop out and he wouldn't notice. he's so over
awareness, probably couldn't tell you the shirt
he's wearing if you blindfolded him. he idly kicks a cheetos
bag and stretches. pour and offer another frothy
coors light. cup is red, white inside, you know, plastic.

he clears his throat. i tell him i understand, am flexible, a plastic,
without speaking. i know what this is. the couch is low to the floor
we are suddenly lying down, whispering frothy
lies, drunk. we know how, we have done it over and over,
just with other people. like choosing funyons or cheetos,
differing sizes, shapes, flavors, brand of shirt.

sigh. we're peeling clothes. he goes for pants, i concede shirt.
games and not even memorable, alcohol a plastic
coating over the world. i hear crunch of cheetos
underfoot walking into the bedroom...time to clean the floor
i could now almost stop and clean, and this could be over
right now. i could stop before it gets frothy

but i do not. wish it was the fifties and we split a frothy
milkshake, instead we do a line and he ties a shirt
around his sweaty forehead. beyond being hung-over,
tomorrow will make ghosts of us tonight, caught in a plastic
bag and floating. falling and we hit the floor,
shocking some part of my brain. am i hungry for cheetos?

coughing, days later, go to the store to buy cigarettes, tampons, and cheetos.
the sky the blue was blinding and a few flighty, frothy
clouds sat in the sky. overwhelming wish to never again see ceiling or floor,

walls, constraints. a feeling of strangulation the collar of my shirt
he walked toward me down the street and i froze, a plastic
lot's wife. we knew what we did not ever have was now over.

i walk on a floor sticky with beer and gritty the crumbs of cheetos,
i am an egg over easy, whites beaten until frothy,
stiff peaks, starched shirt. doll plastic.

The Book
by grey lajoie

The book was born in the city and had travelled a great deal in its short life, though had not lived at all until that moment. When he came, the book did not understand what the ancient being was. An energetic old man, whose consistent smile guaranteed he was well-liked, had acquired the book, along with several others like it, and had stacked them loosely in the back of an old station wagon. As they rode, windows down, some books began to fall, tumbling and twisting, their pages creasing, their spines flexing. As pages flapped furiously in the wind, a sound like the beautiful cries of another object moved through the air, accompanied by a rhythmic vibration that lingered in the binding of the book. Somehow, despite its brief existence prior to this moment, the book knew that this was what freedom felt like.

Months passed, and now the world seemed quite dull. After a taste of life, the book had been placed in a dark corner, on a shelf surrounded by other shelves, all of them drowning in books. The book no longer cared for the likable old man. Rarely had he touched it since he'd placed it here, apart from occasionally irritating it with a careless old rag, which was foul and sour. "Perhaps this is prison," the book wondered.

Time sifted slowly for a while. Occasionally, a bell would ding and people would walk by. The book loved people. They were so full of life. But, they always walked past it without even a glance. Then one day it happened. The bell dinged, and the book waited, as it had always done. There was a voice speaking with the old man, but the counter could not be seen from the book's shelf. The voice would come in quick thunderous segments, asking impatient questions. And then footsteps. Slow and deliberate. Once one was accustomed to his bristling hair, which travelled frantically from either side of his head, it was hard to see anything else but the man's eyes. They pierced the book immediately. There was a chaotic, disturbed expression about them, as if they'd just been pried open for the first time and the air was scorching them. There was an irrationality to them that seemed either of fear or rage. He grabbed the book abruptly, firmly. The shock brought the book a mixture of terror and excitement. As it was carried through the colorless book shop, the book felt stimulation like nothing before. It had never before been held for such duration, and with such grip. Again the book was placed in a car, though, this time, it was placed in the front, passenger seat, and covered by a coat. After a while, the coat was removed and light returned to the book. The man took it inside and set it on a kitchen table. And there it sat, untouched for several days. It did not know what the man had planned for it.

One night, there began a trickling noise on the roof above. Slow at first, then faster and heavier. The book had never before heard this noise. Then something else, the man came into the dark room. He was different. Less impatient, tired, and without his shoes, he did not step with such force. He felt around the table and grabbed the book, still with intention. He took the book to bed with him, along with a glass of water. They sat there for a moment, the book and he, then the man put on a pair of glasses, which amusingly made him look a bit like the old book-keeper. There was a level of intellect in his eyes that had been missed before. Then the man did something unanticipated, unknown to the book. He opened it. And with this, pure bliss pulsed through the book as oxygen met its pages. It was overwhelming for a moment, and then perfect. With each page, complete delight ran through the book. The man would turn the pages slowly, carefully, feeling the texture of each and every corner before turning them. He would flatten them out by gliding his fingertips, slowly and methodically, across each page. After a few pages, the man did something even more astonishing than before. The book did not know what it was at first, as the man's lips moved slowly to form sound with his deep voice. Was he speaking to the book? No, he was reading. He was reading to the book. Oh, to feel the words sliding with such care, one by one, off of the book's pages was like nothing else. The book and the man did this together for several hours, and then the man grew tired.

This became a nightly affair; the book no longer lived in the kitchen, but now stayed on the bedside table, eagerly awaiting nightfall, where it would allow the man to hold it, to whisper to it. The book grew to love the man and it imagined that the man felt the same way about it, as the man only ever really seemed happy in those late-night hours with the book. In the day he was as he was in the book store, short, temperamental, dark. But at night, when everything else fell silent, he would read, his warm voice cutting through cold silence. Time no longer sifted through an hourglass, but was now an endless dessert. It felt as if time did not need to be measured, it felt as though this would last forever. And it did go on for a while, weeks, perhaps months. And then, one night as the rain filled the sky and complimented the man's thunderous voice, it was over. Just like that, the story was over.

Things began to change after this. The man no longer seemed impatient in the day time; he was no longer bitter at the world. He no longer needed the book. And so time buried the book in a layer of dust. One morning when the book thought itself devoid of hope, a voice ran through the house. It was a new voice, high and free and soft. It was a girl, much shorter than the man, with curly blonde hair. She was laughing, which the book had never seen, but the man, too, was laughing. And suddenly the book understood.

This was the reason for the man's changes, his happiness. The book watched them throughout the day, as sadness filled its pages. At one point, the girl saw the book and asked about it, but her father quickly dismissed it, and they went along with their day. When night came, the two sat together, and they read. A new book. It was a thinner book. Its pages smoother and glossier, its type crisper, its binding tighter. It was much less wordy and the two finished it in one sitting, the man reading to both of them.

Years passed with nothing for the book. Only once was it touched in this time, when the girl was still quite young and the book still sat at the bedside table, she put a flower between its pages when the man was not looking, hoping to preserve it for a while. After this, time tortured the book for years, decades. Surrounding objects would grow and change, but life was not given to the book. Eventually it would forgive the man and come to watch him longingly. Once in a long while, the man would glance at the book, seeming deep in thought, and the book would beg and scream with its silent words. But the man would never again touch the book. And one morning, he did not wake, and cold filled the house. Silence lingered for days until the girl returned, now a woman, no longer laughing and no longer free. Rain beat down on the roof, just as it had that first night with the man and just as it had the last night with him. She wandered, like a ghost, looking at everything and touching nothing. Eventually she arrived at the book. She stared at it for a long time, and finally picked it up and opened it. Out of it fell what was once a flower, now black and dead. The book felt a trickle, a single teardrop, then another, and she began to weep. And the book wanted to weep too. Not for the man or for itself, or for the girl, but because it understood now that nothing—not love, nor life—lasts forever.

Open Window
by mallory chambliss

Quiet night, full of sound.
Hear muffled, shrill vibrations of Summer's last song.
Seasons shift into each other.
Hear the depth of God's voice stirring in dark spaces between sounds.
Feel cool air wafting in through the screen, beckoning,
"Come to the forest, where bears roam."
Hear the soft, invisible breeze moving into and over the mountain.
Weather, or some root of nothingness lost to the moment.
Listen quietly.
Feel beyond this realm.
Summer's last song resonates with the infinite.
Faint perception, distracted by the swaying mind, and its unattendant stretching from space to space.
And now rain comes lightly, calmly, and definitively over the mountain, like a wispy, boundless wedding veil.

Prayer
by eric jones

I stepped daily from the cleansing river
and lifted my arms toward the Creator,
casting my eyes upon Heaven and all below it,
and thanked Him aloud for my life and for His bounty –
corn, beans and squash bursting forth from the earth,
forests of deer and bear –
all that I needed for my family, He provided.

Then came the strangers, who taught me to pray their way –
sitting in a dark house once a week,
eyes closed, shoulders bowed toward the Underworld,
silently thanking God only for my sin.

White Father says now that I am Christian
I should no longer bathe daily,
and these clothes from his store for my children
have never been washed.
They are starting to smell like animals as they
learn White Father's language and forget their own.

Once during prayers, I looked up toward the sky,
but there was only ceiling.
I looked out toward the forests,
but there were only walls.
This house smells of unwashed bodies and of the drink
that White Father brings to my chief and the elders
who are still living but no longer hunt.

As White Father mumbles his prayer for my sin,
I stare at my feet, which could not cross the mossy log or river rocks
in these heavy black boots.
I will leave these boots behind the house, put on the deer hide shoes I made
and disappear into the forest.
Returning to the river, I will bathe in the cleansing water,
then lift my eyes and voice once again to thank the Creator for all His bounty.

Grisaille by laura adams

Art Tatum's Minor C
by brian longacre

(Note: When you read the word "splashes" in the following poem, it is very important [I hate the word "very"], crucial that you hold the first syllable an extra beat, as in "splaaaa..." Do not skip this part or you will be committing an illegal poemectomy — only freshman English teachers have that legal option. Then, after you say "splaaaa..." and hold it for an extra beat, do not let go of your breath. Hold it. Hold it. Hold it, silently, silently hold it and then say, "...shezzzz" while exhaling, letting "...shezzzz" ride your breaking wave of breath. And, don't feel like you have to really [I hate that word "really"], fully pronounce the "z" sound at the end. Land on that last consonant like you're kissing a sleeping baby, like you're da Vinci blowing off a gnat that landed in the wet brush stroke of Mona Lisa's cheek, like you're God bent over Adam breathing life into his nostrils. Now, if you've read this far, then I trust you to do this right. In fact, I trust you to hold this poem in your mouth, in your mind, and if you're still willing to read more, then read me next [I hate that word "next"], now.)

I love how Art's minor C splashes.

Something's Amiss at the Townhouse

by angela buley

Perched high on a hill, stately and firm,
oddly enough sits a townhouse
Jautting outward it lies, protruding from earth,
poking; much as a thorn
Curious of sorts, mesmerizing nonetheless, is a
mist surrounding like smoke
Tucked here and there, with no room to spare,
gnomes erupt in a cavalcade
Out of place I would think; be as it may,
I can't help but wonder and smile
Of a neighbor I ask, who dwells in that home?
"I don' no" was all he did say

Perplexed as I stare, gnomes in my gaze,
there's movement of what I nay say
Unsure what see, from mist or the trees,
I tear my eyes off the townhouse
A fool I appear, mouth gaping and queer,
I shake it all off with a smile
Passers' by give me looks, shaking their heads,
glares as sharp as a thorn
Wild crazy they guess, her mind is a mess,
and they prance as if in a cavalcade
Presumptuous are glares, convulsions I scam;
I stand to light up a smoke

I need not explain, my actions are such,
my arrogance lifts with the smoke
"Away with you gawkers, leave me in peace;"
that is all I could muster to say
As mounting their steeds, some with relief,
they trotted away like a cavalcade
Fascination returns, then do my eyes,
back toward the mythical townhouse
What do I see, red, yellow, and green,
blowing roses without their thorns?

Fetching are schemes, with colors agleam;
awestruck, I put forth a smile

Creep closer I must, to see white fluffy tufts,
lovingly wrapping 'round smiles
Deceived I may be, I'm old if you please,
inept or sight clouded with smoke
Light chatter drifts by, a nuance of sorts,
with spine tingling pricks of a thorn
My hearings okay, last it was checked;
the voices from whom I can't say
No one abound, 'cept close to the ground,
gnomes surrounding the townhouse
Probing I be, perhaps I should leave,
and run myself off with a cavalcade

Yet, music now plays, gnomes all a sway,
in unison such as a cavalcade
This need be a trick, my minds not that thick;
I show a humbling smile
Someone must see me, even with trees,
a window from yonder townhouse
The glass is a mess, unwashed I do guess;
sooty or covered with smoke
Befuddled I yell, "What is that smell,"
then find I have no more to say
Ashamed of myself, with pride on the shelf,
forward I head to the thorn

Come hither what may, after such a display,
I have earned a canker of thorns
Invading their space, such a disgrace,
I ought to be shod like a cavalcade
While facing my fear, wind at my rear,
I think of what I need to say
Ignorance will bleed, polite to the tee,

lay forth a bestowing smile
Proclaim I am lost, baffled and tossed;
flail as if there is smoke

Agog I do nod, encompassed in fog,
a colorful landscaped townhouse
Eyes as a thorn, senses reborn,
I find nothing amiss at the townhouse
Lacking of wit, I say "Holy Shit,"
as gnomes walk to me and smile
A cavalcade of self, I speak to the elves;
grateful, igniting a smoke

A Hollow Despair
by danielle wiener

He was skinny.
Too skinny, some might say.
And though his presence was enormous,
Filling every little nanometer of space of whatever room he entered,
He somehow seemed a bit too small.

When he was quiet,
The Earth felt wrong,
The planet felt as though it was weeping.
And she cried,
As if his hurt was her hurt.
Every time he pulled that mask down over his face,
She wondered:
"Who was he trying to convince more,
The world or himself?"

This world was too small for his weeping heart,
His sorrow could not be contained in his
Fragile human bones.
When she wrote the word human
On a piece of smooth parchment paper,
It had seemed so small
When describing him,
Because in the end,
That's all he was,
HUMAN

And mankind was never designed to withstand
Despair as hollow and expansive as his.

Son
by carolyn pidgeon

Little Rambo with your army green do-rag,
Plowing through cricket-infested thickets,
Finding adventure in crayfish laden creeks
And battling beavered logs.

Constructing well squared crates
For no purpose other than wielding hammer over nail.
Proving your prowess to the older boys
With bicycle tricks and alacrity.

You were a tough little guy until the sun
Dipped behind the trees
And you begged for one more story, one more song.
And your heart broke for the wounded
In that fairy tale world
of the weak and the strong.

Confluence Postpartum
by christopher palentchar

How smooth my fingernails slide.
The bronze curve and her goose bump tummy.
Several cylinders combust.
One thigh quivers and her shoulder lies limp.
Calloused palms lose their place.

In that eternal moment, all insecurities dissipate, filed away beneath the ether and beneath time.

From bedpost to bedpost, demons cast white fireballs.
Angels dance in clockwise ecstasy.

Harmony, and
syncopation,
and mattress springs.

I hear a faint squeak fall from her lips.
There are ripples in the vapor.
Outside-mountains roar.

Now suddenly animated, rubbing sparks from her eyes.
She is slightly more than a shadow.
Her cheek is forced to mine.

One teardrop. Salty and shared.
Reality is displaced.

Behind my eyelids we continue our existence. Pain and doubt and hope and fear. We continue in our bags of flesh and bone.

The windows are painted with frost, and here the last snowflake is absorbed into mud.

Grisaille by tracie archer

Testimony
by hali l. karla

He had a look to his eye like he'd seen an other side
Blue glazed bloodshot, bulging from his shrinking skull
nestled in feather cotton plume
Fluffed and primped like the lilac fresh linens
Softly covering the hole leaking purulent stench in his gut
Held hostage to a makeshift bed in his livingroom
ten feet from the front door that would not rest.
Centerstage, he waited with his eyes.

Seven years, six surgeries later,
the doctors had signed off
Sent him home with dry well-wishes
A script for morphine prayer.
His family obliged, rightfully so,
and took him home to "get" well.

He watched them all swarm and fuss
To the tick-tock servitude of the family heirloom
Keeping time to tedious treatments
to ease his body's oozing degradation
with a mix of loyal, muffled disgust
In full-on-faith southern hospitality.

His uncles shouted to rising sounds of Nascar TV
His wife, their son to hip,
Declared this day better than the last
His mother's perfumed lotion spread through the room
to speak her silence
A dozen kin silhouetted the window from the porch.
They wanted to feed him a folk-tea miracle remedy
with their chatter of children and God.
Everything but what lie before them
The ceiling fan alone gave testimony
oscillating siren shadows across his form
A rhythmic lure beyond time
Calling him to their slumbering embrace

He was thirty four with less than a day
No miracle to be had but merciful design
He wanted to tell them,
He tried to tell them
with his eyes.
But no one was listening.

Leaving A Mark
by abigail blythe-batton

Except for that unfortunate stint in my twenties when I shoplifted half the inventory in my local Walmart, I'm mostly a rule follower. I like order. I got married before I had children, divorced before I murdered my husband and once, when the bank accidentally gave me two twenties instead of one, I magnanimously gave one of them back. (They kept it, which disappointed me.)

So I'm not sure what forces were at play yesterday when I granted permission to my eleven year old son to break the law. He didn't openly ask "Hey mom, can I break the law?" That would have been an easier "no" for me. It was more nebulous than that. We were taking our daily walk through the graveyard when it happened. It's a gorgeous graveyard in our neighborhood and we spend ginormous amounts of time there. Walks, picnics, talks, it's the perfect private place. Except that it's public. Which is where the lawbreaking part comes in.

We've been walking there, my son and I, for six days now. I'm in training. Rage Training is what I call it. I've decided I am harboring an enormous amount of rage. I am a generally happy person. If you were to meet me at the grocery shop you would think I was friendly with a little kick of quirk. I like to laugh and enthusiastically seek joy. I sometimes confuse joy with other nouns like gluttony or sex or self-sabotage, but my heart is in the right place. It was only recently I noticed a little trickle of rage seeping out.

One of my children was standing up drinking ice water. This has been a standard no-no in my house since I established it fifteen years ago. I do not like to hear people swallow. Actually, it's worse than that. I don't even like to watch people swallow. If I'm on a walk and see someone in their car guzzling down a drink my heart starts racing and I have to intellectually talk myself down from an adrenaline high that may or may not include hurling rocks at car windows or stripping off all my clothes and beating my chest in a frenetic frenzy.

Our national obsession with water bottles, which I personally believe are used as an emotional substitute for the nipple, has got me all in a tizzy. People are always drinking something. So at my house I attempted to decrease the entropy by strictly enforcing the no drinking while standing up and by god don't put ice your glass. The tinkle sound on top of the swallowing well my goodness, watch out!

We live in a hot climate and while I keep the air conditioning on the frigid setting (I feel it helps kill germs) a few of my children ac-

tually enjoy being outside and when they come in they are sweaty and thirsty. So it makes sense in the world at large that they would get a glass of water and add a cube or two. But in my sometimes frightening head, this simple act is considered treasonous. So the unfortunate child came into her home looking for relief from the hot sun and a nice cool respite with a glass of ice water and what she found instead was an enraged mom rooting through the sewing basket and holding up a sharp pair of scissors with malice in her eyes and the Psycho music playing hauntingly in the background. And it was at that shining parenting moment I realized I have a rage problem.

I solicited an athletic, rolfing friend to serve as my mentor as I attempted to drain the rage out of my body by actually moving it. Moving my body I mean. I'm more a sit down with a nice cup of tea and read a book girl. I try not to go outside unless it's dire (like we are out of toilet paper) and I would never consider sweating. It's just not something I do or particularly like to talk about.

My girlfriend gently suggested I attempt to raise my heart rate for an extended period of time (so the rage episodes don't actually count) and that's when I decided to start Rage Walking in the graveyard. I went there every day anyway, I would just up the ante and walk more briskly. It seemed simple, innocent really.

The first day I went my son agreed to come along. I felt like I was betraying the graveyard community by actually exercising rather than visiting. For years I watched in horror as people jogged or vigorously walked through the graveyard. They wore special costumes of spandex and tennis shoes to let everybody know that this wasn't just a pleasant stroll in a beautiful place, no, they meant business. "Look, I'm wearing tennis shoes with ankle socks and I carry a WATER BOTTLE."

I would sit by the graves of people I pretended were friends and we'd share our dismay openly. "This isn't a gym for goodness sake. People are trying to get some rest around here." I told my favorite tombstone, Addison (1856-1924). She understood. "And what's with the wires coming out of their ears?" She'd whisper. "That's what we call an Electronic Distraction. It helps keep people from really being where they are. We do it with phones now too. You wouldn't' believe the stuff that's been invented to help keep us from our lives. Text messaging...American Idol. It's appalling really."

I was embarrassed my first morning. I had switched to the dark side and become one of them. An exercise person. I wore a pretty skirt and didn't carry any toys (cell phones, ipods, water boobie (I mean bottle), but I felt my dead friend's disappointment as I swung my arms wildly and walked purposefully. And at the top of the treacherous hill I began to sweat. This hill serves as a resting

place for several wives and mothers. That's what their tombstones tell me anyway, "Beloved Mother." "Devoted Wife" One adjective and one noun, that's the summation. That's what you get at the end. Who did you serve and how well did you do it. I talked to the women there and told them it gets better. I encouraged them that in the new section women actually get to have their own names put on their stone rather than a "Mrs." thrown in front of their husband's name. We get to vote and divorce and own property. "We get the pill!" I excitedly told one mother whose children's graves scatter around hers like pebbles on a path.

The sweating concerned me. It's uncomfortable and unseemly. And I was thirsty. But I kept at my honorable task, walking that rage away until I gratefully made it home, limped in the door, drank a full glass of water standing up (my muscles were too weak to ask them to exert any energy to sit down), took a refreshing shower and yelled at the kids for leaving dishes in the sink. All that in fifteen minutes. Hmmm, my rage tank still felt full.

I repeated this routine for five days, my son zooming back and forth on his bike while I sweated as I marched past my friends making empty promises I would linger soon with a nice glass of wine and crusty baguette. On the sixth day we came upon a little rectangle of wet cement. The cement was shiny and placid like the lake in the middle of the cemetery where everyone wants to swim but no one dares because it's in the middle of the graveyard. I suppose it would feel a bit show-offish to have all that fun in front of actual residents whose confinement prohibits them from joining in. It's a bit like nursing your baby in front of your infertile girlfriend. Or eating the last of the Premium Select Double Chocolate Chip Ice Cream but putting the empty container back in the freezer so your mom thinks there is actually ice cream and when she goes to eat it discovers the dirty little trick (enter Psycho music). Actually the ice cream thing is just something that happened recently that enraged me and really has nothing to do with swimming in a lake in front of bored sleepy bodies that can't.

But it has everything to do with finding that small wet inviting rectangle of cement in the graveyard on my rage walk. My son asked if he could put his hand print in it. I didn't even hesitate, I just kept walking and said, almost cavalierly, "yes". He carefully chose his spot, hovering his hand over it before making the actual commitment. "It's squishy." He informed me when he caught up on his bike. I kept walking, concentrating on pushing through the protests my body whimpered out with each step.

I forgot about the incident until I walked by there today. I saw the rectangle from far away and I felt guilty for letting him deface public property. But as I walked closer and saw the details of that

small eleven year old boy handprint, I felt a jiggle. And it wasn't coming from my hips or belly, which are normally the jiggle centers in my body. It was coming from my heart. I walked past that handprint, a sign of life frozen in time,that will serve as a testimony to all who visit here that this boy existed. Look here is his handprint. He was alive. He left his mark. I looked more carefully at my friend's memorials, their middle names, their maiden names. They existed, they were alive. They must have left some kind of mark. What two words would encompass my complicated life? Angry Mother? Divorced Woman? Joy Seeker? What is my mark? Maybe, for now, I'll keep the freezer full of chocolate ice cream just keep walking until I figure it all out. And if I die prematurely, don't let my children write the tombstone. They'd write something like Scissor Wielder and that's only the beginning of my story. I think the end gets better.

My Heart Her Soil to Keep
by logan dugger

I met God on a dairy farm,
pulling gently on Sal's utters.
The irony, my stomach couldn't remedy
A thirst I couldn't quench.

Wheat and hay and harmony.
Grains and stalk with seed.
Plaid jacket overalls and the wide brim hat.
Manure tasted sweet with milk.

New York horns and busy streets.
San Francisco has the sun and fog.
Beauty of a cow patty beats them all.
Sweat and work for precious loam.

Just a mere mortal.
Bringing gold up from the land.
Chuck and pull and lean.
Dust in every breath.

The fire gives me energy.
From plant to man to tree.
The devil came the other day
with a discouraging subsidy.

Used up like dirt.
The smell of God has left this place.
Just me and Sal.
Hands and utters with vaseline.

Earth and I are distant now.
Even though I gave to her,
she gives me less and less.
My heart her soil to keep.

Untitled
by jennie gillette

Burnt offerings of grilled cheese sandwiches
Lay in his disarrayed bed.
A half smoked cigarette smolders
Between the sheets.

His gin soaked Virgin Mary stands weeping.
Ragged and half-beaten,
Coy eyes look out over
a field of a thousand bruises.
Staggering towards the end as
Glasses of wine with lip stained rims
Tumble across her curvy frame.

Praying to a god that will not listen
She shrouds herself in modest wear
Of Egyptian cotton and high thread count.
Eyes clench tight against the image
Of him, of her.

He likes the way a chesty girl butters his bread.

Cleansed
by ivy white

Heartfelt shrieks pierce the twilight
The sun sets on decency

Melting wax from a candle
I drip down to my knees on the floor

The whistle through the air is interrupted
By my sharp intake of breath

Stinging flesh begets stinging tears
In a rush I am released from torment

Spit and tears wet us both
Entwined in the gentle comfort of my abuser

Peony Rose by tamala barnett

Paperback Whore
by johnny vasillion

when i'm under trees
i speak the language of leaves
when i'm in the sand
i speak the tongue of land

doctors umbrella ribs
holding red hot tongs
mouse crucified with rose stems
left to dry outside

menstruating cow
creeping kudzu
grows more brown
faithful hound
has no use for a bone
it splinters in his mouth
won't leave him alone

memories of those forgotten
fly by nights
what is flesh and blood
remains flesh and blood
nothing more than what
you can see smell taste touch
the flesh don't ask for much
just to be inhabited
to stand like a wilted flower
let the mouth devour
electric odors disposable desires

thirsty sentinels drink up
the pulp of faded fire
a bazaar of flesh
pilfering change
from the earths purse
trying to get into
the panties of this universe
it's voice cast a spell
it's breath was a curse
i blow into my fist
to see who dies first

Guarding Security
by kathryn hast

Night classes in Boston always came with wind. We'd walk against it in coats, our bodies diagonal, as we shouted over traffic, trying to get there in time. My classmate, Michael, was short, balding, and bright-bright-eyed, probably the smartest guy I knew. He was from a town of about 2,500 people somewhere in southwestern Tennessee; his wife of five years, he told me, grew up a few houses down. His accent was thick and surprisingly speedy, especially given that he worked 11 p.m. - 7 a.m. as a security guard at MIT. What's more, his enthusiasm for the job was electric.

"Aye jess knocked off olla Auden lass week!" he called, as we side-stepped a puddle. "Olla he-eva wrote. One week!" As the semester progressed, he also "knocked off" all of what Keats wrote, then Virgil, then Beckett, then Mann. He told me that security guards were paid to sit, and so when he sat there, what he did was he read. He also told me he could get me a job, no problem. I could knock off Ulysses, for example, in no time, at $12.50 an hour.

Coming in at roughly 265,000 words (around 800 pages), James Joyce's Ulysses recounts a single day: June 16, 1904. The story is told through a stream of consciousness technique that isn't fond of periods. The sentences go on for pages: eating breakfast, going to a funeral, going to the office, going to the pub, and, famously, going to the outhouse. By most accounts Ulysses is a masterpiece. By all accounts it is long.

"Piece of cake" is what Michael said of it. He called Max the next day.

In less than a week, then, I was issued my uniform, which included blue, waist-high pants; a white, collared shirt; a blue blazer with gold-painted buttons; and an over-sized bow tie, the origins of which must have traced back to the ascot. I'd had to buy my own shoes, so I'd gone to some sort of Mart. They were black sneakers with laces that were way too long; I remember bending down to triple-double knot them before walking like a clown down Mass Ave. to work.

The shifts were all eight hours, but I only ever worked Saturdays from 7-3 and Sundays from 12-8. To my disappointment, I wasn't equipped with any weapons; rather, they showed me the telephone and gave me a key ring. There was also this metal baton we handed off to each other between shifts. It had a magnet at its tip, so when you walked your beat—it was really called that, your beat—you beeped in at various stations, electronically recording the equivalent of "All Clear." My beat covered the Parsons Labora-

tory, where they studied Environmental Fluid Mechanics and Microbiology. What I noticed was a lot of tanks with water—beep, beep, beep—some messy offices—beep—the basement—beep—the roof.

I only worked weekends, so I wasn't able to knock off Ulysses in a week. I did, however, get through 740 pages before anything eventful happened on the job. It was a Sunday afternoon when Max came in, flustered, edgy, and fueled with the kind of panic only security guards know. We had new intelligence, he said, and the threat level was high.

The back story went like this. In 1994, a band of MIT students had pulled off a prank. Despite the full presence of security on campus, they had managed to put a cop car on the roof of the Dome. They'd done it simply, sneaking pieces of cardboard up various stairways and onto the roof, where they then assembled it. As a final gesture, the students placed a blow-up doll—a cop—behind the steering wheel, which, Max added, was rumored to have been covered with shaggy, tiger-print fur.

The police car prank wasn't a direct strike at security guards (although, obviously, we were a "policing force"). But after all these years, it still stung that the students hadn't been caught. And now, now rumor had it that they were conspiring again: the exact same attempt, ten years later, police car and all.

Max sternly warned me that this was no joke. He was working a double shift. He had back-up if we needed it. He had faith I'd be alert. He pointed to the phone.

For the next 45 minutes or so, I was excited myself. I even walked my beat twice that hour—I was really casing the joint, see, thinking like a criminal, anticipating the unexpected. After all, seriously, this was MIT. MIT kids were professionals. You never knew what they might do. Maybe they'd have chloroform, or a stun gun, or handcuffs. Maybe they'd cut the phone lines or have a magnetic baton wand of their own. You just never knew.

*

Anyway, nothing happened. The quiet became painful. I remember feeling sorry for Max and his disappointed imagination. What a silly nation we were, with our rainbow-coded threat levels and hypersensitive reality. I thought of all the nut jobs in bunkers with their canned beans and their Glocks, the computer geeks with their passwords and passwords and passwords, the crossing guards executing such serious agendas.

In the last few hours of that shift, I knocked off Ulysses. The final passage is a soliloquy by the narrator's wife, who is joyously

recalling when she knew she was in love with him. The speech contains what was once the longest "sentence" at 4,391 words. The very end goes like this:

> "...and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume and yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes."

I caught my breath. Closed the book. Turned it over. Eyed the cover. Then I looked around. The lobby at MIT was, of course, quiet, but I got up with my wand, ready to take another look.

Rabbit's Foot
by hayley karbowski

An angora coat struts the streets
attached to a body balancing on stiletto stilts.
Jet black mascara sends her lashes to the sky,
complementing the direction
of her reconstructed nose.
Money speaks nothing of broken backs,
avoided cracks in sidewalks
filled with dirt and people
that fell through them.

She didn't work hard,
but she worked some-
reproduced entitlement.

Melvin sits against
a right angle
created by cement and skyscraper.
He listens for pockets at eye level
Jingling coins
he could use for change
or whiskey.

He used to write for the city newspaper
until the voice in his head
fractured and fucked
bunny-like.
Lacking legal tender,
he now rubs his teeth with holy water
in sleepless church restrooms
and writes his prophecy
on used napkins.

The woman of class passes
as Melvin's eyes roll down the curve of her calf.
She stands above him without a glimpse,
vertically emphasizing the space between.

Someone in his head tells him,
better luck next time.

rabbits foot
still attached

hopped away.

Big Top Circus
by hayley karbowski

Circus-top skin
rests on the helium ceiling
        of my balloon-popped mind.
A firework display of
neurological flares
        stares through
to a three-ring circus,
a kaleidoscope slide
                away.

Step right up
god-fearing magic seekers
I am fun
I am lovable
I am a blood-thirsty tiger, tamed.

The elephant in the room
is on a balancing ball,
avoiding eye contact with
social cues
        on a tight rope.

Poised for the show,
bright lights shine through
sugar-coated eyes.

My painted clown
make-up made up
                our mind.

Today,
I am happy.

A Beach for Each
by johnny vasillion

She was born inside of a hurricane and washed up on dry land. I fell from Orion's Belt when it became unclasped. A milky breeze grabbed hold and brought me here. One morning I heard the mermaids singing each to each. They were devoting their sermons to the green hills. The shadows moaned, my spine tingled. As I turned my glance the ocean leapt into my nose. She drug me back to the shore. Pointing out afterwards how the mermaids fed on the hearts of young men. We spent the rest of the day counting our emotions We tripped into mazes as we unlocked our cages.

I heard the galaxies chatting one night. One would take all the stars in his hand, shake them up and cast them against the night sky. He did this over and over till the desired constellations appeared. When he leaned back to enjoy it, a comet sneezed as it blew by mucking it all up. When she put her hand on my shoulder my head was half the way underwater. She showed me how it was all an illusion. I wasn't looking at the night sky at all just the reflective disguise the water wears at night. She fanned her hand across the illusory blank black slate sending out ripples and exhaling mist.

The next night after supper she told me I looked parched and starved.

She said, "Open up wide and let me feed you the night time."

Mountain lions roared. The eagles soared. By each other we were both adored.

The burning eye blazed across the sky piercing every cloud. It fused, then melted into a golden field. This is when night time came and set the darkness free. The moon was like a bright blue ball and the grass was our bed. Smoke attached itself to every star. I exhaled smokestack lightning and walked down to the waterside. I offered recitations about the inner and outer rings of the inferno to all the baby alligators. They croaked and turned their eyes into slimey beams of light for applause. When I was done promising every reptile his place in hell I watched a snake eat a spider then an owl eat the both of them. Later I wrote a story about a fox who forgot to eat dinner.

When I returned she parted her red lips and every reptile hissed.

As the floating fire rose above the horizon all the thorns decided to attack their rose. Ripping every petal, angels appeared on the silver shore. They told us that every demon was once an angel, and every angel can choose the same.

When she parted her red lips they all hissed.

The Day Momma's Roots Were Showing
by l.h. orndorf

I created quite a stir among my southern in-laws when I joined the Tudball clan as their daughter Lu Ellen's partner. And not because I'm a lesbian, but because I'm an honest-to-goodness debutante.

The Tudballs had been poor dirt farmers and mill workers since before the War of Northern Aggression, but Momma Tudball had always yearned to be part of the country club set. She had long tried to improve the family's social standing any way she could. She even hired an etiquette tutor for her husband and children. Then I came along. She wasn't exactly happy about her daughter being in love with a woman but my being a debutante turned any displeasure and shock into pride. With a real socialite in the family, Momma turned every Tudball family gathering into a social event of the highest quality. But try as she might, their southern redneck roots always showed like a peroxide blonde's dark roots. And Daddy G's 60th birthday party was no exception.

Momma spent weeks planning and preparing for the evening garden party extravaganza. She made lists, lists of lists, and a hundred phone calls. She hired a caterer. She ordered flowers. She hired a band. She even supervised while Daddy G and Junior re-landscaped the backyard. They transformed it from a collection of junk cars and metal sheds into a Roman villa style courtyard complete with an Italianesque fountain at the far end of the patio. A chubby cupid balanced on one toe with its bow drawn, while a stream of water poured through its pursed concrete lips into a shell shaped basin.

Momma spent most of a week shopping for the perfect dress and shoes to go with the pearl necklace she made Daddy G buy her for the party. Then she settled down to address each and every one of the hundred or so invitations by hand, in calligraphy. The invitations, complete with RSVP cards, went out to all the households in the extended family, Daddy G's co-workers and boss men at the mill, the preacher, the mayor, and, most importantly, to the editor of the county newspaper. Momma hoped this would be the social event of the season; the one everyone talked about for months, or years, to come.

The day before the big party, Momma managed to find time to do a little more shopping. After stringing lanterns around the perimeter of the yard and making candle boats to float in the pool, she headed off to the nearest Wal-Mart for the best paper napkins, Styrofoam plates, and plastic sporks money could buy. After all,

this would be a formal affair, a black-tie barbeque.

Since Daddy G was an avid angler, Momma had decorated the dining room in fishing theme. A fly rod and a couple of nets graced the wall behind the table where the food was spread out buffet style. A mobile of fancy feathered flies spun gracefully over it. And in the center of the table, sat an unusual centerpiece.

Perched on a low marble pedestal was a fish bowl the size of a soccer ball and just as round. The surface of the glass was etched with a Japanese goldfish pond. A small stone castle sat on the bottom flanked by several psychedelic plastic plants that were bobbing and waving in a current of bubbles. It almost looked elegant. On the evening of the party, Daddy G stood near the buffet table and greeted each of the guests as they paraded past piling their plates with ribs, chicken, beans and slaw. He was dressed in his best khakis, a white shirt, and a string tie, black of course. He held a short glass of bourbon in one hand and rocked heel to toe on his sneaker clad feet.

"Jimmy Ray, you better take you a couple of napkins. Those ribs are just swimming in sauce. Can't be wiping your face on your sleeve tonight, the missus will be all over you." Jimmy Ray glanced down at his white button-up shirt and then at the pile of barbeque on his plate. He crammed a handful of napkins into the back pocket of his pressed blue jeans and went through the French doors onto the patio.

"G, where can a body get a drink 'round here?" Buster Smith asked. "I'm about to die of thirst and blow away like a dead leaf on a windy day."

"Don't you worry Buster, no one's gonna die of thirst tonight. Junior's got the bar set up on the far side of the pool. Get your food and go on out there, he'll take care of you," G said as he pointed through the open French doors.

Hubert Tudball, Daddy G's cousin twice removed, was the last guest in line. "You are gonna love the bluegrass," Daddy G said to him as he piled food onto a plate. "They're a trio from Spindale. All girls. The brunette is the best banjo picker in the whole county. The other two, the mandolin and the fiddler, are pretty darn good too. They sound as sweet and pretty as they look." Daddy G ushered Hubert out onto the patio and wandered off to have Junior refill his highball glass.

When the room was empty, I moved closer to the table. I wanted to get a closer look at the unusual fish bowl. I was curious to see what kind of fish occupied it.

I shifted from side to side. Then I stood on tiptoes and peered into the top of the bowl. That's when I finally spotted it, an orange and white goldfish, a large one with long fancy flowing fins and pro-

truding eyes. It was resting on the bottom, leaning away from one of multi-colored plants at a 45-degree angle. It was rocking slightly to the rhythm of the bubbler. It was, in fact, quite dead.

I giggled and smirked and went outside to find Lu Ellen. She was standing near the fountain with Momma. They were chatting with Mrs. McDonald, the high school principal. I walked over and interrupted their conversation.

"Good evening Mrs. McDonald," I said. "You look lovely in that shade of teal."

"Mhmm, why, mhmm, thank you," she said while sucking barbeque sauce off her thumb and index finger.

"If you don't mind, I need to borrow Lu Ellen and Momma for just a minute." Mrs. McDonald nodded as she picked up another rib and started gnawing on it. I gently pulled Lu Ellen by the elbow and led her toward the house. Momma followed us.

"What's up?" Lu Ellen asked.

"Just wait, I'll show you."

Hubert and Daddy G were back in the dining room getting seconds of everything. "Daddy G," I said, "you're the guest honor. Why don't you gout and mingle with you other guests? Let us ladies have a chance to set out your birthday cake." I coaxed him out and closed the doors behind him.

Lu Ellen put her hands on her hips and looked at me hard, "What's this all about?"

"Well, I was admiring the fish bowl," I pointed to it, "and, uh..." They were both looking at me, waiting for me to continue. I could see the curiosity on their faces was fading into impatience so I got to the point, "It's the fish," I said, "It's dead."

"No, it can't be," said Momma.

She and Lu Ellen leaned over the table and peered into the top of the bowl just as I had done.

"Yep, it looks pretty dead to me," said Lu Ellen as she stood up straight again.

"But it's not belly up or floatin' on top," said Momma as she continued to gaze into the bowl. She was staring intently at the fish. She seemed to be willing it back to life with psychic thought transmissions.

"Trust me Momma, it is dead," I said.

Momma didn't seem to hear me. She grabbed the bowl with both hands and jiggled it. The water swirled and sloshed around the bowl, some splashed out onto a pile of paper napkins turning them into soggy mush. The inanimate fish fell over on one side, a filmy gray eye stared upward unseeing as a cloud of scales and fuzzy decay rose around it and was carried to the surface with the air bubbles.

Momma gasped and stepped back. "Oh my gosh! What am I going to do? The guests, I can't let them see this. I'll be a laughing stock. And Bill Taylor is here, he'd write this up for the newspaper for sure." Momma was frantic and began searching around the corners of the room. I started to ask her what she was looking for but was immediately shushed. "Sshhh!" Then she whispered,

"The net, I can't remember where I put the net."

"Oh, just scoop it out with your hand," Lu Ellen suggested.

"That's disgusting!" said Momma.

Lu Ellen grinned, her classy façade crumbling. "Why is that so disgusting, Momma? You wipe your butt with your hand don't you? We all do, every day. If you can wipe your butt with your hand, surely you can touch a dead fish with it."

"That's enough outta you. You're not acting very ladylike and we still need to maintain some degree of decorum." Then Momma grabbed one of the plastic sporks off the table.

"Oh, Momma, you're not," I said as I realized her plan.

She made no reply. She raised the spork like a spear over the fish bowl. She repositioned it slightly and plunged it into the water, splashing more onto the table. She speared the dead goldfish on her first attempt and pulled it out. She let it drip over the bowl for a moment.

"See, I took care of it. No one will ever know."

Before either Lu Ellen or I could stop her, she turned and flung open the French doors to the patio where the guests where talking, eating, and generally enjoying the warm May evening. Fragments of conversation, the bubbling of the fountain, and strains of bluegrass music drifted in on a gentle breeze. Momma must have forgotten herself and the guests in the backyard for a split second because without hesitating she held out the spork bearing the limp fish carcass and called out shrilly, "Here kitty, kitty, kitty, kitty!"

Well, I guess it goes without saying; Momma got her wish, people are still talking about that party.

A Cannon Reciprocating
by morgan mcnabb

Gone, you ended that moment, the one that put a hole in my palms,
And you entered my metal shelter, the one that built our home
Just for tonight
Pounding our fist, like a, like a, over and over
Red wine flowing through my veins, flowing, flowing
Freezing my every move
We spoke and spoke and let the night end, end in the stillness
Then the sky was white and we left, we were gone
For months all I could see were frozen images
Your shoulders, your black toes, our hands, street lamps
I felt it, I saw it, I breathed it
The distance between widened like the time
I was aware of my absence more than you
Because I'm not the one, the one who's a part
You, you're a part
But now, we're in this diner, for hours
And it's all the same except it's bright outside
Our eyes can see what's there
And now we can let it happen again and again
Because we're smarter and lonely
You'll linger behind me, bringing the fire into my home
Into this world that I've created

Running on Naps
by j. andrew marshall

I have a confession to make. I don't have kidney stones; although I'm pretty sure my kidneys are turning into stones. Why is that a confession? Because said problem came from drugs. Before you gasp your proverbial last breath in the wake of such a stunning confession in a respected publication, allow me to explain which one I am addicted to. First things first.

Who am I? That remains unimportant. What do I do? To put it in computer terms, I am in every way a background program. You almost never see me, but my job is done. We may interact, but only on rare occasion. Largely, I'm just the guy you go to when your daughter flushes a doll down the toilet. Welcome to my riveting life.

The first job I ever had I was working as a hardware guy. Working my way up from a general use towel-boy of sorts (grunt) to a section manager (slightly higher paid grunt) in the short span of only two years. I am the poo. I am still the poo. I'm still there.

The stardom of that job, however could not afford itself to my lavish (lower-middle class) lifestyle, and I was soon faced with the option (see: necessity) of getting a second job. This second job is one that also suits my abilities and expectations. I am still a background program. Running the night audit at a hotel isn't exactly as easy as you might think; yet it isn't unfathomably hard by any stretch of the means. It takes incentive, self-drive, a high tolerance for boredom and some energy.

Day 1. The running definition for optimism is: "a disposition or tendency to look on the more favorable side of events or conditions and to expect the most favorable outcome."

"Well, working two jobs isn't fun, but I can do this. I'll just go home, take a nap and go to work. I'm young; I can handle this. It's only another eight hours." Those were my words of encouragement to me. A sort of "rah-rah" chant focused on and performed entirely by me.

I arrive early; I am supposed to meet the owner of the hotel who is going to train me. He doesn't show up; let me be clear. He doesn't show up late; he certainly isn't early. The man is not here. Nor will he be for the rest of the night. Not even a little.

Luckily, and much to my relief, the other night auditor shows up. He has no idea who I am, nor why I am here. Congratulations, management, you've just earned a brown star. Thankfully after convincing him to put down the phone and stop dialing "911", John and I work well together. He is an older man, in his late for-

ties, early fifties, maybe, and bears an incredible resemblance to John the owner of Garfield. Oh, Irony... that was a good one.

The job isn't physical except for the running around like the proverbial beheaded edible fowl when trying to get breakfast out. But that's only if you forgot about it! The hardest part, honestly, is being bored! But we've got T.V. to fix that. Not a big deal. A cup of coffee helps to keep my attention span open. Now I remember why I like this stuff.

"Congratulations, you made it!" I tell myself. "See, this isn't so bad! You've got this, no problem!" I am my own cheerleading team.

Day 2. The running definition of enthusiasm is: "Great excitement for or interest in a subject or cause."

So it's night two, and I have to admit, I'm stoked! I'm ready to go, and I've got the knowledge that the worse is behind me to back me up! I get there early, and start preparing for the night.

John proves himself to be an interesting man. A geek, if you will; it's kind of cool, it feels like looking into a future mirror image in some ways... maybe with a few adjustments... I hope. John and I talk about the process of the night audit, and I jot a few notes of no real value down on my 8.5" x 11" legal pad. "Interesting" I tell myself. "This isn't hard. Not even a little! This should be a breeze." After a few moments, I don't even bother taking notes. "Pishaw! I've got this!"

The routine basically breaks down into two sections: before midnight and after midnight. Before midnight we have to take care of some food things. After midnight comes all the paperwork, a few more food things, and some minor cleaning... we watch more TV than anything.

A cheap energy drink and a cup of coffee helps even things out, because, I am starting to get tired... after all, I've worked 32 out of the past 48 hours. Ah, well. Time to go home. I pat myself on the back slightly. Go team.

Day 3. The running definition for dyslexia is... well... it's basically a visual impairment where things start switching places; whether that be in the form of letters, numbers, or words... or sentences... or paragraphs... or people. It's like playing a child's memory game, only in real life. I don't like memory games. I kind of don't like real life.

I get there on the third night, and take notes on the process of the paperwork, how the computer program works, how everything interacts with everything else, what needs checked and what I should leave alone. John is rushing me tonight for some reason. I don't like that. Stop it, John.

I slack off taking notes so I can get this done quicker and get the hunchback off of my back. "This was simple yesterday, what the

hell happened? These numbers don't match! That should be three thousand, four hundred and twenty three, not eight thousand, two hundred and thirty fo--oh... crap." I'm scatter-brained, to put it mildly. Dyslexia is apparently worsened by sleep-deprivation.

Around two o'clock, I can't stay awake easily. So I chug an energy drink, and as the caffeine goes to my head, I start to realize that this isn't as easy as I thought. As I sit here doing this paperwork, time just beats merrily on around me. And since this is taking so damned long to get finished, I won't even have time for T.V. And we forgot to get the eggs out for breakfast. This timing thing may be harder than I thought.

I slap myself to keep awake as I drag myself out to the car. Good effort, team.

Day 4. The running definition of apathy is: Lack of interest or concern, especially regarding matters of general importance or appeal; indifference.

It's night four. I'm tired, I'm cranky, and I'm late. Triple threat. John eyes me suspiciously as I fall into the door that leads behind the counter. I eye him right back. His shirt is disheveled. As always, mine is clean and pressed. Have some respect, John.

The cash drawer is under the first time I count it; over the second time I count it. Where those fifty dollars came from I don't know. I don't really care. John counts it, and it comes out right. Thank you, John.

One o'clock rolls around, and I have to have a cup of coffee; I don't want it, I need it. Oh, God, I am never going to make this if I can't stay awake and I just got here! In between sips of coffee I calmly (inwardly panicked) ask John questions about the night audit that I haven't even thought of before. I look down to see what I've written. I can't even read it.

After breaking out my Johnny Quest decoder ring, and trying to decipher the inane scribbling that has become my handwriting, I realize that we never laid the food out of the freezer to thaw. Breakfast will be rushed, which means the paperwork will be rushed.

John is now less helpful than ever. Thank you, John. I try to shake thoughts inapplicable to the job from my head. I kick myself in the ass on the way out. Way to suck, team.

Day 5. The running definition for Purgatory is: any condition or place of temporary punishment, suffering, expiation, or the like.

Night fifty (it seems) I feel horrified to even get in the car. I don't remember driving here, but here I am in this God-forsaken place. This isn't a job; this is dress rehearsal for hell.

I do my job mindlessly, forsaking the thoughts that battle valiantly against the doors of my mind, trying to tell me to care about what I'm doing. I just do it. My thoughts, what few there are, are

hardly what I would call rational strands of thought. I am a ball of yarn.

Let's review. I'm sick of energy drinks, and coffee, but I need them. I'm sick of cereal, and microwavable sandwiches of every conceivable type, but that's all my meals can be. No time for anything else. I'm sick of being awake. I can't sleep, I don't want to eat, and I shake near constantly. God bless money.

Oh, cruel fate, that I should be so wounded by the job that I sought to give me gain. Cruel Irony, you once brought me laughter, but have now brought me to a readily available substance that I am now addicted to.

I travel the long road home, half awake, mostly in a stupor; I find myself with a moral to cling to from this time in Purgatory. Sleep in what energy you can. Drink in what you can't.

Sunset of Years
by timothy steparnen

When I had fallen from the sky,
I forgot how to live forever.
The icy sobs of a comet,
Its dreams of sunbeam kisses,
They could no longer reach me here.
My race was almost run.
I could not stay in this world for much longer.
Too many flowers of discord bloomed
From disparate fantasies that mimicked
The sun's magenta afterglow.
As the wind scattered their petals away,
Far away into lost shadows,
I walked beside of a melodious ghost.
I remembered my vague memories,
And requiems for anachronistic dinosaurs.
The voices echoed in spectral valleys.
I forgot how to care about good and evil.
Yet, as I faded into the enchanted abyss,
The love for a blue star would be all that is left behind
In the sunset of my years.

Cambob by halima flynt

Floating Fever
by adam carnes

A traveling showboat splashes wishes on wires high and starboard
The sense that it makes is childish when it first starts.
Clouds misting the gypsy waves that
Caress simple taste
Away from brave palettes.
Following stars and
Fallen to slumber.

The color is seven shades of green
Sounds ping pong with crest and trough
Numbing the sensation exhaled
Dumbing down the thoughts
Strumming and drumming up the courage to
Dream.

Time and space
Split water with precise solar understanding.
She is there and God is there.
Smiles cascade and
Panoramically flash and meld to circumstances,
New beliefs held there are now old and are now past.
Power leaves the form of greed behind
Tragedy now so sublime
Travesty the storms alert me to
Awake.

Climbing out of slumber,
The navigating sky bludgeoned by fog.
The taste of sea air
Complex and coarse with waves crashing onboard.
She has grown angry and upset the course.
The mast cracks while it snaps under hellacious winds.
The attack leaves only the plank to walk.
The split in water shocks the senses to
Awake.

Running Code
anonymous

6:15 PM. Most people were heading home, or were already there. My day was just beginning. Just fifteen minutes into my twelve-hour shift, I pulled my patrol car into the parking lot of St. Michael's Church to finish a report from the previous night. Forty or so toddlers, teens, and adults - all members of the church - occupied the area, enjoying a bake sale. Despite the usual stereotypes associated with the relationship between police and low-income neighborhoods, no frowns greeted my arrival. I eased my car to a stop near a group of people and began to work on the report when Father Martinez approached

Noticing him walk up, I rolled down the patrol car's passenger-front window. Wearing a casual polo and tan slacks, Father Martinez fit in well with the relaxed atmosphere. We smiled at each other; getting to know the respectable members of the community was one of the more satisfying aspects of my new job. Father Martinez began the small talk about how the bake sale was winding down after a typically successful day. We discussed crime trends around the neighborhood and finally an incident especially close to Father Martinez. Several months before, he had been leaving the church late one night when he heard laughter behind the building. Investigating the noise, he found two young men spray-painting graffiti on the church wall. When they tried to run, he caught the slower of the two and held him until the police arrived.

Father Martinez told me that he felt sorry for the young man, just nineteen years old. Whether the boy needed religious guidance, as Father Martinez felt was the case, I didn't know, but some sort of guidance is needed to dissuade acts of vandalism. Father Martinez had even offered to drop the charge if the boy would agree to clean up the graffiti. The delinquent, however, never showed up to do it. I nodded in agreement with statements about the loss of moral fiber and family structure in our country.

The two-way radio in my patrol car suddenly broke its silence with a loud, piercing tone, alerting every on-duty officer that an emergency dispatch was to follow. Having only been on solo patrol for one week, I was yet to be given the opportunity to "run code" - going to an emergency call with blue lights and siren on. I listened intently, hoping to hear my call sign - two-adam-forty.

"Two-adam-forty, two-adam-twenty, adam-four. Possible suicide," said the emotionless female voice. Two-adam-twenty was

Parnell, another shift officer; adam-four was Sergeant Aldin, my supervisor.

I picked up the radio's microphone and responded, "two-adam-forty, go ahead." A suicide wasn't the action I often hoped for, but it was certainly a chance to run code. I needlessly apologized to Father Martinez: the expression on his face told me he understood the conversation was over. Putting my seat belt on, I moved the gear shift into drive and accelerated toward the road.

"3029 Evans Lane. Nineteen-year-old male, not conscious, not breathing. Family member advises they found him hanging from a tree. Call-taker is walking the caller through CPR."

"Two-adam-forty direct, en route." Methodically, my fingers found their places on five toggle switches in my center console. I pushed down and all of the emergency lights on my car came to life. One more switch and the siren was on. My foot heavy on the gas pedal, the Crown Vic's V8 roared, and I was off.

I constantly reminded my eyes to scan; tunnel vision could be the only necessary step toward crashing my car. People walking, bicyclists in the road, drivers not noticing my blue lights and siren until I was feet away from them - potential disasters everywhere. My heart felt like it would explode out of my chest. Excited, but nervous, I didn't really know what I was getting into. I was CPR-certified and I'd done it a dozen times on a dummy, but the thought of performing CPR on a real person weighed heavily on my apprehensive mind. I quickly let the thought slip away and reminded myself to just go where I was told, and handle it when I got there. I watched the GPS on my computer and followed it, still having not yet learned all of the side-streets of my district.

Lights and siren blazing, I slowed down at every red light and made sure that the traffic had stopped for me. It was a wonderful experience: feeling the reverence of the other drivers as I demanded - and was granted - total control of the road. Despite the power, it was rush hour in a city of 70,000+ and the traffic was unusually heavy. My heart raced as I glanced between the computer and the windshield, computer and windshield. Stress, worries, and the seriousness of the situation aside, I couldn't keep myself from smiling from the pure adrenaline thrill.

I finally turned off the main road and into the neighborhood - a "project," as most called it. I was responding to my first call to actually help someone here; despite my short time working, I had already made several drug-related arrests here. Seeing that I was close and that most traffic was gone, I turned off my siren but kept the blue lights on. As I finally turned onto Evans Lane and

began to look for house number 3029, I saw at least five distressed neighbors waving me to my target.

"Two-adam-forty, ten-twenty-three," I informed dispatch that I had arrived at the destination. I parked my patrol car directly in front of the depressed, single-story house and its untended, overgrown lawn. Exiting my vehicle as quickly as I could, more people waved at me frantically, ushering me to the back yard. The people were all lower-class whites - a minority in a neighborhood of lower-class blacks - dressed in ragged, generic-brand clothing. Had I passed any one of them on the street just months prior, I probably would have felt an arrogant mix of pity and disgust.

I ran beside the house, rounded the corner, and took in an overwhelming sight: a dozen family members and friends stood in a semi-circle around a middle-aged woman who was sobbing uncontrollably on her knees, leaning over her only son. The frantic attitudes of the neighbors who had rushed me here were gone. The tearful eyes of family members glanced at me, almost unaffected by my presence, then back to the woman and her son on the ground. It was my first look at true despair.

I stood in shock for a fraction of a second before instinct and training took over. Given the circumstances, as politely as I could manage, I told everyone standing around to move back. I knelt next to the boy's mother and noticed that her shaking alone alarmed me. She almost appeared to be convulsing. I had never seen such panic in a person, though no word can accurately describe her composure. I told her to pick up the phone laying next to her, and to talk to the dispatcher. She slowly picked up the phone and stumbled back several feet - enough room for me to perform CPR.

Kneeling next to his chest, I looked at the boy, already laying on his back, and I paused, looking over the scene. On his far side was a thin, rusty chain. His uncovered chest was milk-white, as was his face, in contrast to his dark brown hair. The rest of his skin was equally pale - whiter than that of any living person I had ever seen. Vomit covered his purple lips and, for some reason, reminded me of cole slaw. The vomit immediately told me that the young man had not broken his neck as is the intent of hanging, but rather, he had choked and faded agonizingly into unconsciousness. I put my hand over his neck and felt for a pulse, but his heart sent no noticeable amount of blood to this cold area. I squeezed his wrist, hoping to find a pulse there, only to be disappointed again. I was taken aback by the limpness of his wrist; never before had I felt a person's body hold absolutely no physical resistance.

I heard sirens in the close distance and relief washed over

me as I knew that the paramedics would soon take my place. I felt the eyes of everyone on me. Parents, grand-parents, aunts and uncles, all watching me. Me, twenty years old, a boy myself - I had never before performed CPR in a real attempt to save a life. Grown adults cried, held hands, and stared at me - a boy - knowing that they had called 9-1-1 and I was a professional who was surely going to save the life of their loved one.

A typically unprepared rookie, I had left my latex gloves in the trunk of my patrol car. I made a conscious refusal to try to clear the boy's airway with my bare fingers and felt a brief pang of guilt. I instead located his xiphoid process and moved my fingers several notches up his sternum. I put the heel of my hand between his ribs, interlaced my fingers, and began giving chest compressions. With all my might, all my adrenaline, and every ounce of my 150 pounds, I pushed. And I pushed. And I pushed. Spectators, just feet behind me, whimpered and moaned. Some tried unsuccessfully to console the others.

Still alone. Though only a few minutes had passed since my arrival, I worried that I would be the only first responder to help this boy: God had given the burden to me alone. After countless chest compressions, I again grasped the boy's wrist - still no pulse. I resumed the chest compressions and finally I heard the dispatcher call me, "two-adam forty?" I had forgotten that EMS couldn't enter the scene until a police officer authorized it. I was hit with another wave of guilt for keeping the real professionals away from the young man who needed them.

I clicked the shoulder microphone and shouted, "adam-forty, send EMS in!"

Though I hadn't known, firefighters and paramedics had been waiting in the street - thirty yards away - for my authorization. Within moments, they rushed to the back yard and relieved me of my overwhelming duty. When I saw all the gear they brought with them, I again felt guilty. I had brought nothing to help the poor boy. I stood back and watched, breathing heavily and sweating. I'd been told that CPR would quickly wear a person out, but I had underestimated the fact: I felt like I'd just sprinted a mile.

Parnell, the other officer dispatched to the incident, and Sgt. Aldin, arrived moments later. Unaware of exactly how to handle the situation, Sgt. Aldin directed me to gather information from every witness. I went to each family member and asked what had happened - any details they could possibly remember - and jotted down everything I could. I tried to be kind as I asked painful questions about an unfairly fresh situation. As terrible as it was to ask everyone to reflect on the incident, I still had a job to do.

While I was busy gathering every detail I could, the paramedics rushed the young boy out on a stretcher, with a pneumatic piston pumping on his chest. I didn't know if they were actually expecting to save him with it, or if they were putting on a show of effort for the family.

After talking to everyone I could, Parnell and I were told to secure the scene while we waited for a detective to arrive. Despite all indicators pointing toward a suicide, all scenes involving a dead body had to be treated as homicide scenes. We taped off the back yard, and began small-talk of our own. I was new to the shift and was still trying to get to know everyone. Whether we were trying to drown out the emotional trauma of the incident, or were just ignorant of it, we joked with each other. Sgt. Aldin saw this and scolded us, reminding us that everyone else here had just lost a loved one. Seeing police officers laughing was a terrible display for us to put on.

The detective finally arrived and interviewed each family member more thoroughly than I had. When he finished, so did I. I submitted my report of the incident and moved on to the next call. I pushed away any immediate feelings linking me to the young boy; I still had more than half of my shift left. There was always another call to answer.

Every day since this incident occurred, I've painfully remembered the boy. I don't remember his face or his name. I do, however, remember his house and its exact location on the street. I remember the green-yellow color of the grass. I remember how white and cold his skin was. I remember its unnatural texture. I remember the chain with which he hanged himself - the type of chain one might use to confine a outdoor dog. I remember, in the following days, wanting to stop by his house to speak with his parents. I also remember not having the emotional strength to do so. For whatever reason, however, the most prominent thought in my mind has always been the vomit on his lips; I recall its image vividly to this day. It always reminds me of cole slaw, and now, cole slaw always reminds me of his unnecessary death.

The first few weeks immediately following this situation were the worst. I lost much sleep, thinking about what I should have done differently. I drank excessively, trying to rid myself of the thoughts. I felt guilty for my mistakes. I felt guilty for my own guilt - my emotional pain - when the boy's family felt much worse.

Based on information from my report, the detective's report, and the autopsy, it was confirmed that the young boy had died from asphyxiation. He also had a blood alcohol content of 0.18 and had several illicit prescription drugs in his system, and

had just been dumped by his girlfriend. His time of death was approximated to be 3:00 PM. Despite this, I don't think the guilt is any less: I believe I've simply learned how to ignore it more easily.

Unknown how great a factor it was in his suicide, the young boy had legal trouble on top of everything else. The following morning, he was to be tried for vandalism of a church. And while Father Martinez surely went to court the next morning, there would be no one for him to testify against.

contributors

Anonymous
I am a college student who began a law enforcement career at a young age, though it was unwillingly cut short. I am now enrolled at A-B Tech with the intention of transferring to a university to pursue a career in another field. This piece of writing is intended to highlight an important side of law enforcement that the public rarely considers.

Tamala S. Barnett
Tamala is an A-B Tech graduate and works in the Arts and Sciences Division. Her interest in photography began at an early age. She quickly became known as the photographer in the family always taking photos at family events. She enjoys gardening, photography, reading, and spending time with family and friends.

Abigail Blythe
Abigail considers writing as essential as martinis and dark chocolate. Currently, one of her manuscripts sits in a New York publishing house in a large stack of, likely, inferior manuscripts. "It's just a matter of time," she says, as she gently instructs one of her three teenagers to add more olives to her drink.

Angela Buley
Raised in upstate New York, with a lot of "outdoors" to explore, Angela seldom sets aside time for reading. During her late teens, she was introduced to Shakespeare and fell in love, discovering that literature went beyond comic books. Now, she is a college student working toward a BS degree in Criminal Justice, reading a lot of textbooks.

Adam Carnes
Adam moved to Asheville two years ago and really enjoys the creative spirit of the community. He hopes to continue his education at a university to become a music therapist. Writing is an important part of his life and he is glad to share a snippet of his work with all who read it.

Mallory Chambliss
Mallory is a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) student at A-B Tech. A native North Carolinian, she has lived in Asheville for five years, and has found the beautiful mountains an inspiration in her writing. She writes for the joy of it, having written poems and short stories since college, and taken two online writing courses through A-B Tech. This is the first poem that she has submitted for publication.

Logan Dugger
Logan is a new writer with a lot to say. Growing up in the Appalachian Mountains, he has found inspiration in the fascinating anthropology of the region. Many of his works delve into the rural world, capturing the struggle of the impoverished and displaced, in a tone that both soothes the spirit and incites the mind.

Halima Flynt
Everything is interesting. Life is quick but we have the power to give it pace, to notice the beauty, and allow ourselves to enjoy the little things. I am a natural light photographer who is interested in capturing the exquisiteness of our world. I am enjoying the process of studying this art. I love to learn new things and spend my time questioning why the world is the way it is. Photography is a beautiful way to represent and portray a perception of reality.

Jennie Gillette
Jennie lives in Fairview, is the mother of two, and the wife of one. In her spare time, she is a full-time student working hard towards a Masters of Divinity in the hopes of becoming an ordained pastor. Lover of all things artistic, she spends what free time she has baking, crocheting, sometimes gardening, and writing.

Kathryn Hast
Kathryn has an M.F.A. in Writing, Literature, and Publishing from Emerson College in Boston, where she was a security guard for four months. She is currently the Coordinator of Adjunct Faculty Support at A-B Tech.

Eric Jones
Eric has taught English and ESL in European, Middle Eastern and Asian countries, as well as journalism, writing and public speaking in the U.S. His stories, essays and poems have appeared in The Southern Quarterly, Rapid River, Soul Fountain, Hello, Hello, Hello, The Write Room and Navy Times.

Hayley Karbowski
Hayley is an A-B Tech student, grateful and excited to be part of *The Rhapsodist*. She is a Pennsylvania native happily living in Asheville, NC. She is also passionate about words and nature.

contributors

Hali L. Karla
Hali is an artist of various mediums - word, paint, photography and life - with deep interest in healing and spirituality. She is also a registered nurse with a background in hospice, who currently teaches at various places (including A-B Tech's nursing program), and operates a small mobile footcare business for the elderly in Asheville, NC.

Grey LaJoie
Grey has lived in Asheville all of his 20 years. Grey is an unpublished children's book writer and illustrator, being the progenitor of *The Heavy Headed Man*. Grey is a self-proclaimed devout romantic, amateur existent, and word inventorator.

Brian Longacre
Brian decided to major in English when it became clear that the classes he most wanted to take were all related to language and its artistry. He began teaching English when it became clear that he could introduce others to its beauty. Reading and writing have been the essential building blocks of his life, and they have afforded him adventures throughout the world and across the human experience. To share a poem is to whisper what the world will not recognize.

Andy Marshall
Andy spends his time banging his head against computer keyboards in his double-wide home in the bustling town of Swannanoa, North Carolina. His future goals include becoming a psychiatrist, publishing several books, finding his underwear, and teaching sarcasm as a second language on a college-grade level. He is 23. He is also single.

Morgan McNabb
Morgan is currently a freshman at A-B Tech. She just moved from Dayton, OH to Asheville to pursue a career in music management and is new to the literary realm. "Human expression of our truths is the driving force in most of my life."

Taylor Walker Mitchell
Taylor is from Chapel Hill, NC. He loves language and knows language will guide him to the ends of the earth.

L. H. Orndorf
L. H. Orndorf is originally from Philadelphia, and she is a Sustainability Technologies student. She is on a mission to save the world while making it laugh.

Christopher Palentchar
Christopher originally hails from a small commuter town in central New Jersey. He does not have a fake tan. He owns no gold jewelry or white "wife-beaters." Nor does he gel his hair.

Carolyn B. Pidgeon
Carolyn has taught language arts and history in the Compensatory Education at A-B Tech for the past twelve and a half years and has lived in Asheville, N.C. for over twenty years. She has written poetry since she was nine years old and has just recently finished a novel. Her other pastimes are playing the guitar and gardening.

Timothy Steparnen
Timothy writes poetry from a cosmic and unknowable perspective. He is the founder of Timdor Books, which specializes in the publication of modern fairy tales and sentimental novels for children. Mr. Steparnen currently divides his time between California and North Carolina.

Tamsen Turner Todisco
Tamsen was born in Vermont and moved to Asheville in 2008. She has been writing poetry since elementary school and also enjoys reading, learning, singing, and being outdoors. When not attending school or working, Tamsen spends time with her husband and two cats.

Julianna Werning
Julianna is a native of Colorado who is now enjoying her recent transplant to the Blue Ridge Mountains. The hills have been a welcome home to her as she backpacks, rock climbs, absorbs the local music, and tries her hand at artistry. Favorite mediums for Julianna include pen and ink, oil, and encaustic painting. She is currently finishing her Associates Degree in Nursing at A-B Tech, and looks forward to starting a new job and marrying her fiancé in June.

Danielle 'Dani' Wiener (pronounced Wīner)
Dani was born in Houston, TX, and is currently a junior at the School of Inquiry and Life Sciences at Asheville (SILSA). She enjoys being a theater tech, sleeping in, psychology, and her pet cat Tsuki. Her immediate goal is to graduate high school and live someplace with warm weather. She writes poetry, watches movies, and drinks green teas for relaxation.

Interested in submitting your creative writing or artwork to The Rhapsodist?

We will begin accepting submissions for our next issue in September 2012.

Check out our Facebook page for details (The Rhapsodist Literary Arts Journal (A-B Tech Community College).

Send all queries to rhapsodistjournal@gmail.com

cover image by julianna werning

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